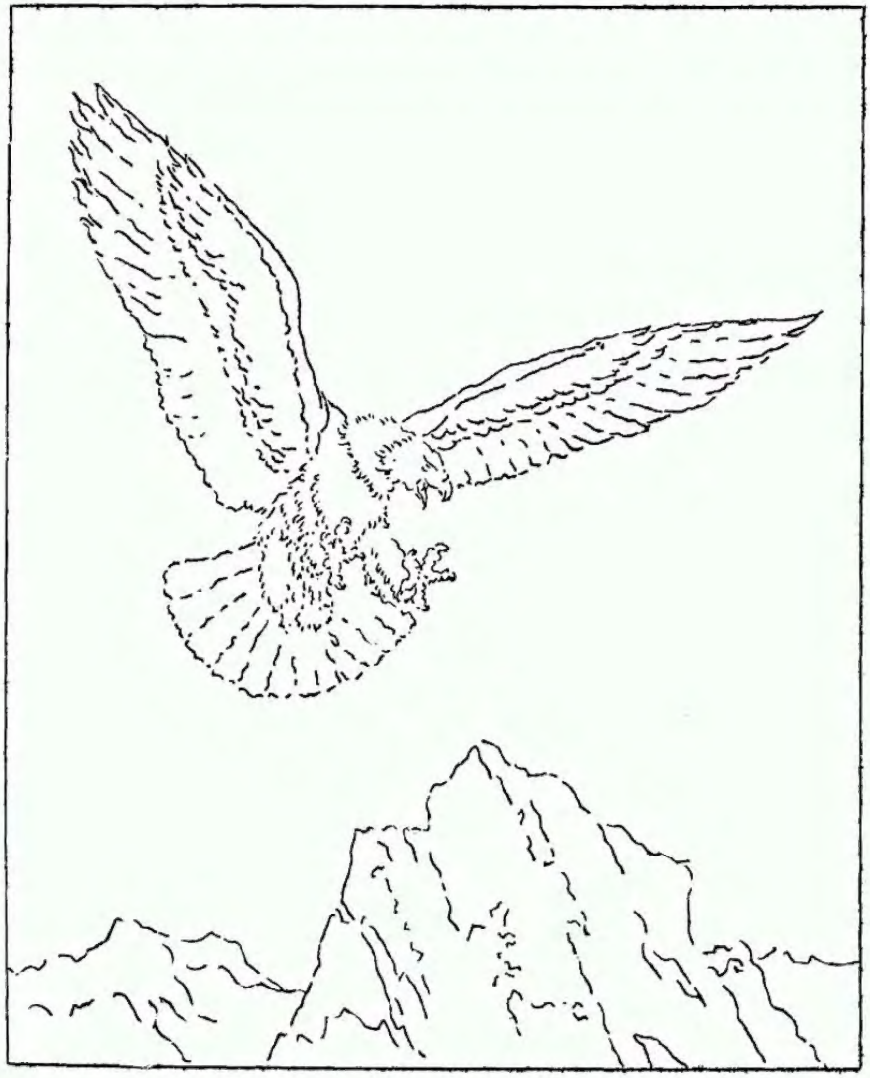
THE MIGRANT



JUNE - 1930

OUR PURPOSE AND AIM

By Vernon Sharp, Jr.
President, Tennessee Ornithological Society

The Tennessee Ornithological Society was founded October 7, 1915 at Nashville, Tennessee by seven representative ornithologists - Dr. George Mayfield, A. F. Ganier, Professor A. C. Webb, Dixon Merritt, Judge H. Y. Hughes and Dr. George Curtis. From that date it began a scientific study of birds that has contributed a vast amount of valuable knowledge through permanent records that have been compiled and preserved concerning interesting data from all sections of the state. Numerous expeditions and week-end trips have carried the membership into even the remote regions of Tennessee. From the Great Smokies to the Mississippi, from Duck Town to Reelfoot, during every season of the year, these places have been visited. And it is the dream and expectation of this organization to publish some day a worthy volume on birds that will be accurate, interesting and a source of true information on our feathered friends.

The publication of this leaflet, The Migrant, is prompted for seaveral reasons. First, the T. O. S. sincerely wishes to stimulate a real interest in bird life throughout the state by educational information on this subject. Secondly, it wishes to strike new contact with other naturalists in order to develop a medium of exchange for interesting data gathered by the entire membership. Lastly, it aims to fill the role of a query box, so to speak, for those who need assistance along the lines of nesting, migration, range, identification, economic value and habitat.

The Policy and aim will not be to create an excessively technical or scientific leaflet. Again, the primary object will not be to seek national ornithological recognition through the publication of articles written in a manner that only the advanced student will benefit by them. Instead, the T. O. S. desires to follow a plan whereby the professed amateur will receive the greatest benefit, and through which the interested person will find the necessary encouragement to continue.

Accuracy and honesty are the two essential attributes for successful bird study. This fact cannot be impressed too forcibly upon the mind of the amateur nature student and it is earnestly requested that the utmost care be taken where discoveries and records are to be reported. When there remains a doubt, wait until this uncertainty can be cleared before the find is submitted as a permanent record. Provided such a policy is followed this publication can grow into a most interesting, as well as worth while document for the lovers of nature over the entire state.

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The white-eyed vireo is one of our twelve most common summer residents. Do you see it?

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WARBLERS OF TENNESSEE

By Geo. R. Mayfield

The warblers are the most beautiful, the most useful, the most interesting, and the least known of our North American birds. In color, form and grace of movement they bid for first in beauty. With tireless energy and voracious appetites they consume such quantities of harmful insects that they come second to no species in point of usefulness to man. Their long journeys (in many cases) over two continents, their appearance at definite places on fixed schedules, their unusual songs and call notes, and their food and nesting habits make them easily the most interesting of our birds. But they bid defiance to all but the most enthusiastic bird lovers. To find these birds, one must scan the tops of trees till neck muscles are sore; or spy out briery thickets until clothes and skin are badly torn; or climb the mountain heights where these birds are free from the perils of the low lands. It takes time, patience, and eternal vigilance to cope with these elusive flashes of color.

Of the possible thirty-five species to be found in Tennessee nearly one half are known to nest in Middle Tennessee. They are the Black and White Warbler, the Blue-winged, Cerulean, the Chat, the Hooded, the Kentucky, the Maryland Yellowthroat, the Ovenbird, the Parula, the Pine, the Redstart, the Sycamore, the Louisiana Water Thrush, the Yellow Warbler, the Prairie, the Prothonatary, and the Worm-eating, - seventeen in all. Five other species are known to nest in East Tennessee from the Cumberland Plateau up to the heights of the Smokies - the Black-throated Blue, the Black-throated Green, the Chestnut-sided, the Canadian, the Golden-winged. Two other species have been reported nesting in Tennessee but no records have been made by the Tennessee Ornithological Society since its founding in 1915. These two are the Blackburnian, and the Swainson Warblers.

Eleven other species have been recorded as passing through Tennessee either during spring migration and fall or in spring migration only. They are the Bay-breasted, the Blackpoll, the Cape May, the Morning, the Magnolia, the Myrtle, the Nashville, the Palm, the Tennessee and the Wilson Warblers. There is a bare possibility that the Blackman, the Kirtland, the Orange-crowned, and the Yellow Palm may be recorded by some keen-eyed observer but it will take a cadaver to make the skeptical accept the record! It is this challenge which ought to keep ambitious observers on the qui vive.

Warblers have to be followed with the ear as well as with the eye. In fact, some of the above species were first revealed to bird students in Middle Tennessee by their songs. Notable among these was the Cerulean Warbler which is fairly common but not recorded as breeding in Middle Tennessee till he was found singing in the tops of high trees near Ashland City. The Nashville Warbler is also noted for his love of the heights and few persons in Tennessee

WARBLERS OF TENNESSEE (Cont'd.)

ever see him. The Worm-eating Warbler can be found, as a rule, only after hours of search and a person dull of hearing is not likely to suspect the presence of this elusive, ventriloquial-voiced dweller of remote hollows. But many species are more friendly and they encourage even the beginner to make a study of the warbler family.

Frank Chapman in his classic handbook of the Birds of North America has this to say:

"Warblers are at once the delight and the despair of field students. To the inexperienced their existence is unknown and when search revels the before unsuspected fact that one's woods are thronged with birds as exquisitely colored as the daintiest tropical forms, we feel as though a new world were opened to us. Entering an apparently deserted bit of woods, we hear faint lisping tseeps, and soon discover that the tree-tops are animated with flitting forms. What limitless possibilities there are in a flock of warblers! Who can say what rare species may be among them? ... perhaps the bird we have long vainly looked for; perhaps a stranger from another clime."

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A swallow-tailed kite was killed on the South Harpeth River about November 4, 1929. This is the first record of this specie in Tennessee.

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Reed's Pocket Guide of Birds East of the United States can be purchased at any book store for One Dollar.

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Ninety seven species of birds are now known to breed in the Nashville area (within twenty-five miles of the city). But of these ninety seven only twenty species have been found nesting here but once.

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Our annual pilgrimmage for the Spring was taken to Pinhook, Paradise Ridge, May 11 and a compiled list for the day was a total of ninety-one species of birds. A large percentage of the membership attended. Besides the birds seen and the hardy meal eaten, some of the members took this opportunity to get some of the wild flowers and ferns. This region is one of the richest in Flora in the Middle Tennessee basin. The rugged beauty is alone worth the trip, not including the birds.

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A very rapid trip was taken twelve miles beyond McMinnville to Short Mountain. The distance caused the time to be taken up chiefly in driving there and back. Climbing abruptly up the side of the mountain, the bird life was found to be scarce. The trip turned into a geological nature when each person brought back to the cars an armful of geodes.

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HOW TO BEGIN THE STUDY OF BIRDS

By A. F. Ganier

With the first number of this little journal it is perhaps in order that something be said about methods of studying birds. Members of long experience will find nothing new in what follows since this is written chiefly for the benefit of our newer members.

Since the average person can name accurately no more than a couple of dozen species of birds, perhaps the first activity worth taking up is the extension of ones ability to recognize more birds. A list therefore should immediately be begun and this be added to from day to day, as rapidly as we are able with certainty to identify additional birds in the open. For those who are able to have help from seasoned observers, a list can rapidly be built up but the knowledge so gained will not "stick" unless it is followed up by regular field work. When necessary to acquire this knowledge without aid, color guides are very valuable and these can readily be obtained. The use of the guides will make the observer accurate in noting the size, color patterns and other characteristics of each species. To illustrate the opposity, we sometimes have new members come to our meetings, wanting to know the name of some bird they have seen and the description they give will not fit any bird, alive or extinct. There is no likelihood whatever of discovering a new species of bird in the United States, so if what your eyes convey does not fit the looks then the fault was in your accuracy. Perhaps the best guides for the beginner are Reeds Pocket Guide to land birds and Chapmans "What Bird is That," either of which can be procured for about a dollar and a half. Chapmans Handbook, costing four dollars, is very complete in giving the habits, distribution and markings. The distribution or range feature is quite important, in enabling us to know what birds are to be expected and at what seasons. Field glasses are a valuable adjunct, particularly for the beginner. These may be bought for from eight dollars up while excellent binocular glasses, magnifying eight times, can be purchased for as little as twenty dollars.

Thus equipped for identification, the bird student should begin to keep field notes. Write down your observations; it will serve to make you more accurate and help you to remember what you have seen. When you have added a new bird to your list, write down the description, what it was doing, the sort of environment it was found in and how it conducted itself. If you do this, you will not only remember this bird but it will help you to differentiate it from some closely related species. Remember, that in Tennessee we have about forty three species of warblers, eighteen species of sparrows, eight species of vireos, etc. So the game is one you can play year after year without coming to the end of it. Even after you have learned to identify all of the 280 or more species of birds to be looked for in this state, the field of bird study is still hardly

HOW TO BEGIN THE STUDY OF BIRDS (Cont'd.)

entered. The life habits of the birds, each specie differing from that of the next and each running constant, is yet to be explored. Take for instance the two wrens which build their nests about our homes, the Bewick and the Carolina. Their habits, song, eggs, nest and deportment are quite different in every respect.

The identification of birds by their songs and call notes is a study in itself and it is possible to become very proficient in identification by this means alone. But color and song are by no means the only means, many students have learned to identify birds by their deportment alone, so that when the light is too poor to see colors and the bird is silent they are still able to distinguish them quite accurately.

Finally, keep daily lists of the birds you identify on your field trips, and file them by months, for future reference. Printed cards, 3 x 5, listing the common birds, are available for this purpose and may be had from the Tennessee Ornithological Society Secretary at forty cents per hundred, the cost of printing. If you live in or near Nashville, Knoxville or Memphis, arrange to attend the local chapter of the T. O. S. in these cities. The one in Nashville meets every other Monday night, at Peabody College, except in the summer months, and prospective new members are always welcome.

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MIGRATION

By H. C. Monk

At Nashville the Robin usually begins the spring migration when it appears in thousands, usually sometime in February. These flocks are on their way to Northern nesting grounds and pass thru our region in a few weeks.

This year, however, there was no such marked migration, the robins passed thru so gradually that but little notice was taken of them. The Starling however supplied a spectacular beginning to our season. They became abundant in December, remained until about March 20th, their numbers declining gradually thru February and March.

February brings other migrants, notably the Grackle which comes about the middle of the month, while Dones and Red Winged Blackbirds appear about the same time. On the 25th the Woodcock was found by Dr. Mayfield.

March brought Pied Billed and Vesper Sparrow on the first, Phoebe, Chipping Sparrow and Shrike on the 9th, (Natcatcher on the 15th (Walker) Cowbird 16th and Louisiana Water Thrush 16th (Crook). March 17th our Bird Club heard reports of nest building already under way by Phoebe, Robin, Bluebird and Carolina Wren.

In April many more species arrived and cannot be given in detail here. The cool weather retarded vegetation and delayed the migration somewhat. Most species appeared on their average dates of arrival but in small numbers.

MIGRATION
(Continued)

The bulk of the birds came in later so that many species which we find common in April were not so this year. An unusual record is Fox Sparrow, 11th, (Mayfield) our second April record. This species usually leaves in late March. Last year the House Wren was present thruout April. This year none were seen. This well illustrates the rate and erratic status of this species at Nashville. On the lake many water fowl have been listed. Five Loons, April 10th; Blue Wing Teal, 12th; Ruddy Duck, 19th, the latter quite rare locally.

Only a few unusual records distinguish the rest of the season. May 4th, a Golden Winged Warbler, the third local record, was seen. May 3rd, an Old Squaw Duck was on the lake. This species arrived in January and stayed nearly four months.

In the middle of May a flight of Black Terns passed thru middle Tennessee. This bird is rare in spring but common in fall. A few of these Terns were seen at Radnor Lake. Dr. Mayfield saw fifty on the Cumberland River at Shelby on the 18th. On the same date fourteen were seen at a barnyard pond at Bellevue. As this is written, May 20th, a few Warblers are still in the region, especially the Black Poll. The Cuckoo is not yet common and the Wax Wing which remains into June is just becoming common. A few late straggling Scaups are on the lake. It is too early to present a final summary of the season but on the whole it appears to be average with few highlights. These general remarks are based on dozens of records by all observers which it is impossible to list here.

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